

“Keep safe, keep healthy” the heart of Rössing’s Covid-19 campaign

Early in March 2020 the President of Namibia announced that the “World Health Organization has declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Therefore, Namibia has to take steps to deal with this pandemic.”

The President said that “COVID-19 is not only a threat to the lives of the Namibian People and the public health system, it also bears negative economic impacts threatening the survival of businesses and consequently jobs and livelihoods. Our key priority is therefore to curb the spread of disease.”

And as the saying goes – the rest is history, meaning that one does not need to give a lot of extra details about it as it is already well-known.

What is probably not well known are the urgency and resourcefulness of actions that Namibian industries took to combat the spread of the virus to limit its impact on people and business, guided by the Government’s regulations.

At CNNE Rössing Uranium talk about the pandemic was pressing. A number of expressions seldom used before, became everyday words - state of emergency, measures to contain the spread, measures to strengthen detection, testing, quarantine, isolation and contact tracing, essential services, protecting the health, security and safety of the Namibian people. And probably the most used expression – respond to effectively minimize the spread of the virus and its related impacts on life and limb.

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As a first step

Following the announcement of the state of emergency Managing Director at Rössing, Johan Coetzee, said in the very first communication to employees and contractors at the mine site: “It is important to know that Rössing has a Covid-19 Emergency Response Plan which follows a four-phased approach towards managing the Covid-19 outbreak.”

As a first step Rössing refocused its current Emergency Response Plan and kept it live to be updated as new information became available and changes were observed.

Communication with employees and contractors, which also extended to their families, became critical but well planned and well researched for the correct information that would really

help all to “keep safe, keep healthy” - this became the heart of Rössing’s information campaign messages to its 1,000 employees and their families and about 1,000 onsite contractors.

“As expected the situation under the Covid-19 measures remains dynamic and changes quickly,” said the Managing Director.

“In line with the guidance given by the Namibian Government, allowing for mining activities to continue in a limited form, despite not being an essential service, Rössing did set out a strategy to maintain operations in a limited or minimal form. This strategy was embarked upon against the mitigation measures we have put in place and presented to the Namibian Government with regards to the various aspects in terms of the mine’s Emergency Response Plan.”

And then in late March 2020 good news was announced by the Managing Director: “We have finally today received confirmation from the Minister of Mines and Energy that minimal mining operations and critical maintenance work will be allowed to continue under the lockdown previously announced.

“Although mining is not regarded as an “essential service”, it is recognised as a strategic economic sector to sustain the economy, particularly during this period when other sectors like tourism are heavily impacted.

“Our strategy under this exemption will be to maintain a limited operation, which will assist our cash flow and limit the number of people on site.”

Communication and more communication

Already in January 2020 Rössing issued its first internal communication to employees about the Coronavirus. An internal newsletter was designed and quickly the newsletters to all employees and contractors were widely distributed, well read and above all, specific health and safety measures were implemented – at first unrelated and not known by employees and contractors, but quickly relentlessly applied.

Signage went up on site and at corporate offices, indicating social distancing, wearing of masks, wash your hands regularly and the number of persons allowed per meeting room or office. Regular communications from the Managing Director's office were issued. These addressed travel restrictions to and from site, understanding temperature measurements, be safe and healthy at home, fake news, social stigma, coping with stress during Covid-19 and contact tracing.

It is a team effort

Rössing found that employees took the Covid-19 pandemic and related Government regulations and company arrangement very seriously – after all it was to keep safe, keep healthy.

Social distancing became the norm. The capacity of our buses transporting employees to and from work between Arandis, Swakopmund and Walvis Bay were cut by 50% to

allow for social distancing. This allowed employees who could perform their tasks from home, to stay at home, thus reducing the risk to be exposed to the Covid-19.

The mine's environmental and health sections put heads together when they could not source plastic spray canisters for hand sanitizer at various points on site, and asked employees to bring to site empty spray canisters from home, and the problem was solved.

Many employees gave their masks a personal image, such as their work section name, without disturbing the effectiveness of the masks.

As work at the mine continued and the tonnes of uranium oxide were drummed, Rössing did not forget its social responsibility activities.

In March 2020 Rössing donated N\$200 000 to the Ministry of Health and Social Services in support of the campaign against Covid-19.

Soon after this Rössing availed an oxygen generator plant to the value of N\$4.5 million for the new COVID-19 isolation facility at Walvis Bay.

Stretching out its hands further, Rössing donated personal protective clothing (PPC) that would safeguard personnel at the Swakopmund state hospital involved in dealing with the current impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The donation valued at N\$10 000 included PPC such as goggles, shoes, gum boots, overalls and chemical

overalls for personnel operating the hospital's incinerator, and important items for infection control. Also donated were dispensers and sanitizers to support the hospital's medical wards.

Staying safe and healthy

The Chairman of CNUC (China National Uranium Corporation) in Beijing, XU Kaiyun, in a message to Rössing's employees did much to give support.

He said: "Since mid-March, when the first confirmed COVID-19 case in Namibia was declared by the Namibian Government, Rössing has mounted swift, decisive and comprehensive measures to contain the COVID-19 outbreak and to safeguard the health of our staff, which is highly commendable.

"I would also like to express my appreciation to all Rössing colleagues for your valuable understanding and support for the measures the company has been introducing. The purpose of all these counter measures is to ensure the safety of our staff and contractors assisting us and is really necessary for protecting all of you."

"I sincerely hope that all our Rössing employees will stand together with CNUC to meet this global challenge. The health of all employees and your families is foremost in our concerns."